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SUBJECT: Egyptians Miffed Over Continuing Algerian Antagonism

REF: 09 CAIRO 2261; 09 CAIRO 2193; 09 ALGIERS 1077

CLASSIFIED BY: Donald Blome, Minister Counselor, State, ECPO; REASON:
1.4(B), (D)

¶1. (C) MFA Cabinet Advisor Mahmoud Afifi told poloff Feb 7 that although the Egyptians have returned their ambassador to Algeria, and are seeking to publicly downplay the recent diplomatic row between the two countries, the Algerians continue to antagonize Cairo. Note: The diplomatic tension was sparked by violence surrounding two soccer matches between the countries' national teams in November (reftels). Algeria advanced to the World Cup as the result of those two matches while Egypt's hopes were dashed. Egypt, however, recently defeated Algeria en route to winning the African Cup. End note.

¶2. (C) Afifi said that as far as the Egyptians are concerned, "the crisis is over." However, he claimed the Algerians are still harboring a grudge. He expressed frustration with the Algerian media, and cited a Feb 7 MFA report that highlighted recent Algerian articles critical of Egypt. Afifi said the criticism is largely focused on Egyptian foreign policy, especially Cairo's relations with Israel, but Algerian media has also "attacked the political equilibrium and the future of power in Egypt." Afifi said the Egyptian media had complied with a request from the GOE to cease attacks on Algeria in early December, and did not understand why Algerian media attacks continued. He said some believe the continuing criticism is related to internal Algerian politics; he noted that President Boutiflika and FM Medelci had been careful in their statements, but Said Boutiflika, (the president's younger brother) had been leading the antagonism.

¶3. (C) According to Afifi, the Algerians have not responded to Egypt's demand for compensation to business property damage following the November soccer matches, which he estimated to be in excess of USD 60 million for approximately 14 Egyptian companies. He claimed that the Algerians had been obstreperous toward Egyptian efforts to file insurance claims.

¶4. (C) Afifi said the African Handball Championship will be hosted in Cairo (beginning Feb 10) and will include the two Algerian national teams (women and men). Afifi said the Egyptians have encouraged the Algerians to participate. However, he complained that the Algerians had requested over-the-top security measures, and had sent an "antagonistic" letter to the African Handball Federation expressing security concerns. Nevertheless, Afifi said the GOE policy will continue to focus on a positive public posture toward Algeria.

SCOBAY